

THE LAW WHICH CREATED THE SOUTH CAROLINA
SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

By U. S. Senator Strom Thurmond

When I recall the enactment of the law by the South Carolina Legislature to create the Soil Conservation Districts and to establish the State Soil Conservation Committee, it seems impossible that 20 years have passed since that event.

Yet when I read the latest statistics on the success of the Soil Conservation Districts in South Carolina, I realize that 20 years is a short time indeed for the accomplishment of so much good in the interests of soil conservation.

A brief look at the statistics shows that every year of the 20, since April 17, 1937, the date the Soil Conservation Act became law, has seen an average of more than 2,047 farms entered into the program, attaining the present total of 40,959 farms now engaged in conservation practices.

Still more amazing is the average number of acres per year which have been put under conservation practices since 1937. There has been an average of 340,061 acres each year placed under approved practices, till the program has now attained a total of 6,801,225 acres. That is one-third of the land of the State.

Thus we see that in a comparatively short time conservation of our land in South Carolina has developed from nothing into a vast, indispensable system of land preservation and improvement.

Before having the bill introduced in the State Senate, of which I was then a member, on March 24, 1937, I remember discussing the matter with Ernest Carnes of the Soil Conservation Service and L. D. Holmes, a prominent farmer of Johnston in Edgefield County which I represented. I also conferred with others, including Dr. T. S. Buie, who was Southeastern Regional Director of the United States Soil

Conservation Service, J. W. Gaston, Sr., prominent farm leader of Duncan, and E. C. McArthur of Gaffney, who later organized the National Association of Soil Conservation Supervisors.

My interest in soil conservation came from my own early life in Edgefield County while working on a farm and later while serving as an agricultural teacher. I had a deep interest in seeing steps taken to conserve the land, not only for my generation, but also for the generations to come.

That is why I sponsored the bill in the Legislature.

The bill pointed out that "the farm lands of the State of South Carolina are among the basic assets of the State and that the preservation of these lands is necessary to protect and promote the health, safety, and general welfare of its people; that improper land-use practices have caused and have contributed to, and are now causing and contributing to, a progressively more serious erosion of farm lands of this State by wind and water..."

The consequences of this serious erosion of the land was also pointed out; How the soil washed and blew away, how the rivers were being silted, how wildlife food and coverage were destroyed, etc.

Most important, it cited the fact that crop failures were bound to result from such neglect of the land.

The bill stated: "That to conserve soil resources and control or prevent soil erosion, it is necessary that land-use practices be adopted and carried out..."

Finally, it was declared to be the policy of the Legislature to provide for such conservation.

Soon after the bill was signed into law on April 17, 1937, Joe B. Douthit became district supervisor of the Upper Savannah Soil Conservation District and is now the oldest supervisor in years of service in the United States. Willie Camp of Gaffney is the second.

I am happy today that my faith in the land, and in the men and women who work it, has been completely justified by the fine accomplishments of the past 20 years. In my opinion, few pieces of legislation ever introduced in the South Carolian Legislature have ever had more lasting or more far-reaching effects.

We are yet to see greater achievements on the part of the Soil Conservation Districts. I am sure their advances in scientific farming will be as significant in the next 20 years as they have been in the past 20 years.

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April 2, 1957